

# THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY SKILLS AT KEY STAGE 1 OR 2

PARENTS

# A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



Developed by the Swim Group to help parents understand why it is important their child learns about swimming and water safety at primary school and what to do if their school is not offering lessons.

This guide has been produced by Swim England on behalf of the Swim Group. The content has been developed by experts from a range of organisations involved in the provision of swimming and water safety lessons in primary schools.

This series of guides for primary schools, parents, pool operators and swimming teachers, is designed to ensure all children meet the requirements of the national curriculum PE programme of study by the time they leave primary school in Year 6.

It also aims to ensure the consistent delivery of swimming and water safety lessons across the country that fully support the teaching of the three outcomes.

For more information and support materials visit [www.swimming.org/schools](http://www.swimming.org/schools).

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY

1

Swimming is a life skill with many physical, mental and social benefits.

2

Learning basic swimming and water safety skills could save your life.

3

Swimming is an activity that can be enjoyed throughout your life time.

For many young people, learning to swim is a key part of growing up. Swimming lessons often lead to Rookie Lifeguard courses, diving clubs or other water-based activities. Without basic swimming skills, young people may also be excluded from an increasing number of school activities and trips.

A big part of early swimming lessons involves learning how to enjoy the water safely. This means understanding what to do if you get into trouble and how to call for help. This is also known as 'safe self-rescue'.

With drowning being the third most common cause of accidental death in children, it is vital that young people are also made aware of the dangers of different types of water. For example, swimming in the sea with its currents, cold water and seaweed is very different from swimming in a pool.

The importance for all young people to learn swimming skills and about water safety was underlined by the Department for Education in 1994 when it made swimming and water safety lessons compulsory during primary school.

## **Benefits of water safety and swimming lessons:**

- Learning to swim allows young people to have fun in the water with family and friends.
- Water safety is an essential life-saving skill.
- Learning about water safety in different water environments and situations is vital to staying safe in and around water.
- Swimming provides numerous physical and mental benefits throughout a young person's life. It is good for the heart and lungs, can help with muscle development, and is also thought to help concentration.
- Knowing how to swim provides access to many other water-related activities – and careers.

# PRIMARY SCHOOL SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY

By the time a child is ready to leave primary school at the end of Year 6 they should be able to swim, know how to get out of trouble if they fall into water, know the dangers of water and understand how to stay safe when playing in and around it.

Swimming and water safety is part of the national curriculum PE programme of study for England, which means **all** local authority-maintained primary schools must provide lessons during Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2.

As a national curriculum subject, school swimming lessons must be free to all pupils. Costs, including those associated with facilities, swimming teachers and transport, should come out of the core budget<sup>1</sup>.

Primary schools are free to choose when they hold their swimming sessions and how often. This means some schools might take pupils swimming throughout their time at primary school, while others might only take pupils in one year group.

The number of sessions may also differ with some schools delivering lessons once a week for a term, or a more intensive programme of each day for a week. These lessons must support every child regardless of their swimming ability.

For some young people, primary school might be the only opportunity they have to learn these important life-enhancing and potentially life-saving skills. This means that schools must ensure **all** young people reach the required standards before they finish Year 6, including providing additional lessons to ensure they are able to be safe in the water.

Independent state-funded schools such as academies and free schools do not have to follow the national curriculum. However, they are required to provide a 'broad and balanced' education which should include teaching pupils to learn how to swim and about water safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Advice about charging and voluntary contributions can be found in the Department for Education document Charging for School Activities (2018): [www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities)

# SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY LESSONS

## What should my child be taught?

The national curriculum lists three outcomes that all pupils must reach by the end of Year 6. These are **minimum** standards of swimming and water safety and will help to give young people the basic skills to be able to enjoy the water safely.

It is hoped that young people will want to develop their water skills further by taking part in swimming sessions outside of school.

The national curriculum requirements:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of <b>at least</b> 25 metres.	Use a range of strokes effectively.	Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

## Understanding the national curriculum swimming and water safety requirements

Like any national curriculum subject, there are certain outcomes that pupils need to reach in order to pass the subject.


Unlike external swimming lessons where the swimming teacher has more time to focus on developing a young person's skills, the school programme is about introducing children to swimming and water safety and giving them the knowledge to keep themselves safe.

*Primary school swimming is not about learning the perfect stroke, it is learning about how to stay safe in the water.*


National curriculum requirement	What your child will learn
<p><b>1</b> Swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres.</p>	<p>The ability to swim confidently from one end of a 25m pool to the other without touching the walls or floor. This is the <b>minimum</b> distance and many pupils may be able to swim further.</p> <p>How to maintain their strength throughout the swim so that they can comfortably achieve the distance.</p> <p>How to use their chosen stroke effectively throughout the swim.</p>
<p><b>2</b> Use a range of strokes effectively.</p>	<p>How to swim on their front and back using different swimming strokes.</p> <p>Which stroke to use when. For example, treading water to help with survival and self-rescue, front crawl to swim fast in a race.</p>
<p><b>3</b> Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.*</p>	<p>The potential dangers of water and how to act responsibly when being near different types of water e.g. canal, river, lake, reservoir, sea.</p> <p>How to use self-rescue skills and when to use them if they unintentionally fall into the water or get into difficulty.</p> <p>What to do if someone else gets into trouble in the water and who to call for help.</p>

\* For more information, please see the [Water Safety Information section below](#).


Examples of different ways to use the front crawl technique for different situations:



Swim in a competitive race: front crawl with face down and using side breathing.



Play water polo: front crawl with head up.



Tread water: use a front crawl-type leg action in a vertical position.

## Beyond the minimum requirements

Schools understand that within a class or year group there will always be a mix of swimming abilities. The school's obligation is to ensure every child meets that minimum standard, particularly in relation to water safety.

If your child has already received swimming lessons, or if they reach the swimming and stroke requirements quickly, schools should offer them other activities to make sure they continue to develop their skills.

***It does not mean they stop going to the school swimming lessons.***

Below are some examples of activities that schools may offer to help children stay engaged and continue to grow their confidence and capability in the water:

- Teach basic water polo or synchronised swimming skills.
- Approved lifeguard or life-saving training, such as the Rookie Lifeguard programme.
- Advanced water games that involve other subject areas such as problem solving.
- Practical experience of swimming in different environments through programmes such as Swim Safe.
- Involvement in events such as School Swimathon or the School Games swimming galas.
- Involve children in the annual Big School Swim with its different pool and classroom-based activities.



# HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

As a parent/carer you play a vital role in encouraging your child to swim and learn about water safety, survival and self-rescue. You can do this in a number of ways.

- Ensure you have advance notice about when and where the swimming and water safety lessons will take place. Ask about the programme and what your child will be learning so you can talk to your child and help them to understand what to expect (see below for information on specific skills that should be taught).
- Challenge the school if you do not feel your child is being given sufficient quantity or quality swimming lessons.
- Make sure the school provides you with regular updates on your child's progress and attainment.
- Many schools reward achievement with badges or certificates. Recognise and celebrate their successes at home. The small steps are just as important as the larger milestones.
- Volunteer to help with primary school swimming by supervising children when they are being transported to and from the pool, and when they are at the pool.
- Your child may want - or need - more time to practise swimming than is provided by the school. Go swimming as a family or sign them up for additional lessons at a local facility.
- Secondary schools are not currently required to provide swimming as part of their national curriculum. Continuing swimming lessons is crucial to help your child develop further skills and become a more confident, safer swimmer. There are lots of different types of lessons available including water polo, diving and outdoor swimming. Young people could also join a local swimming club.
- Use visits to the beach or other water locations to explain the flags and safety signs. Help your child to recognise the dangers of water and understand and follow water safety advice. The free Swim Safe programme is available to the public as well as schools and runs throughout the summer. Visit [swimsafe.org.uk](http://swimsafe.org.uk) to find your local site.

Swim Group comment:

// It is important to remember that meeting the minimum national curriculum requirements for swimming and water safety does not guarantee the safety of a child when in, on, or near water.

Although not in the national curriculum for Key Stage 3, 4 or 5, the recommendation from the Swim Group is that by Key Stage 5, every young person should be able to swim 400m competently.

They should also know, and understand, the individual peculiarities and characteristics of inland and coastal water so they can make informed decisions about enjoying the water safely and responsibly. //

# USEFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

The following includes a range of resources and information to help ensure your child is being taught the right skills to pass the swimming and water safety programme:

- Frequently asked questions
- Checklist for primary school swimming and water safety lessons
- Water safety information

If you do not feel your child is progressing enough, discuss with the school. This is particularly important if your child is new to swimming, but also if your child can already swim more than 25 metres: there are many more skills to learn!

For more information about swimming in schools visit [www.swimming.org/schools](http://www.swimming.org/schools)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Q My child was taught to swim before they started primary school. Why should they take part in the school lessons?**

**A** Many children will have some swimming ability before they reach primary school. However, private swimming lessons differ from the national curriculum which focuses more on water safety and self-rescue skills. Even if your child is a confident swimmer, they may not be aware of the different types of water and what to do if they get into trouble. It is therefore important that **every** child takes part in primary school swimming and water safety sessions so we can be sure that **every** child in the country has these important skills.

**Q My primary school doesn't offer swimming lessons. What can I do?**

**A** All local-authority maintained primary schools must offer swimming and water safety lessons before pupils leave in Year 6. If yours doesn't then contact the Headteacher, the Governors or your Local Authority Education team to ask them to investigate.

**Q My child is going to an Academy. Will swimming be offered there as well?**

**A** Independent state-funded schools such as academies and free schools do not have to follow the national curriculum. However, they are required to provide a broad and balanced education which should include teaching pupils to learn how to swim and about water safety. If you have any concerns, discuss with the school.

**Q I am being asked to pay for my child's school swimming lessons. Is this right?**

**A** No, as a national curriculum subject, school swimming lessons must be free to all pupils. Costs, including those associated with facilities, swimming teachers and transport, should come out of the core budget. Talk to your school if you have concerns.

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**Q My child has special educational needs, are they also allowed to go swimming?**

**A** Yes - it is very important that **all** children have the opportunity to learn these important skills. Individual needs should not be a barrier for a pupil to attend school swimming lessons. Talk to your school if you have any concerns.

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**Q My child is disabled, is it safe for them to go swimming?**

**A** Yes, public swimming pools are well equipped to support young people with a disability to access the pool. It is the schools responsibility to ensure this is in place and that the swimming teacher has had the required training to provide any additional needs and support.

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**Q My child is scared of the water and hates the idea of school swimming lessons. What can I do?**

**A** There are lots of resources available to help you introduce your child to the water. Have a look at [bit.ly/IntroducingSwimming](https://bit.ly/IntroducingSwimming) for ideas, and talk to the school about your child's concerns. This way they can ensure the swimming teacher is aware and can support in the water.

# CHECKLIST FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY LESSONS

The following aims to help parents and carers ensure they and their child is ready for school swimming and water safety lessons. If any of these are missing, or you have any concerns, please talk to the school.

## Information provided by the school:

- Information about when, where and how long swimming sessions will last
- Information about who will be accompanying the children and teaching the lessons
- An overview of what your child will be learning and how.
- Information about what to take to the swimming lesson
- Regular updates about progress and attainment
- Information about what you can do to help your child practice the skills they are learning

## Swimming lesson preparation:

Waterproof kit bag with the following items:

- Suitable swimwear
- Towel
- Swim cap
- Money for locker
- Drinks bottle
- Any additional items recommended by the school e.g. a healthy snack to eat afterwards

## Swimming and water safety skills:

As a minimum, all children should be taught the following. Depending on your child's ability, they may be taught additional skills such as water polo, rookie lifeguard etc.

- How to enter and exit the water safely
- How to float and rest in the water
- How to rotate from back to front and front to back
- Pushing and gliding
- How to breathe in water
- How to move effectively and efficiently through the water using:
  - Front crawl
  - Backstroke
  - Breaststroke
  - Side stroke
- Swim at least 25 metres without touching the wall or floor of the pool
- Survival and self-rescue skills:
  - Treading water
  - Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP)
  - The huddle position
  - Breath control
  - How to attract attention
  - Sculling
  - Swimming in clothes/with buoyancy aids
- Water safety skills:
  - The different types of water environments
  - What the different flags and warning signs mean
  - What to do if someone else gets into difficulty
  - The emergency number

# WATER SAFETY INFORMATION

## 1. The water safety code

The water safety code is a short, easy to remember guide to acting safely and responsibly around water.

### Key safety messages:

Always swim in a safe place

Always swim with an adult

If you fall in: float, breathe, relax

If someone else is in trouble call 999 or 112

## Staying safe around water

### Stop and Think:

- Water is always moving
- The water is colder than you think
- Edges can be dangerous
- There may be dangers under water

### Stay Together:

- Never swim alone - stay close to a friend or family member
- Find a safe place to go - only swim in the sea where there is a lifeguard
- Plan your activity - check weather, tide times, get local advice and wear the right clothing for your activity

### Float:

- If you fall in, float until you feel calm
- Signal for help, raising one hand in the air and shouting for help
- If you can, swim to safety or hold on to something that floats
- Keep warm if you can't swim to safety, using the Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP) or huddle position

### Call 999 or 112:

- If you see someone else in trouble in the water call 999 or 112
- Never enter the water to save others
- Look for something you can throw to help them float like a life ring or even a football could help
- Keep watch until help arrives

## 2. Recognising the hazards

Swimming pools	Sea and coastal areas	Inland water sites
Slippery surfaces	Waves and tides	Speed of the water
Different depths	Sudden depth changes	Debris and pollution
Steps/hoists	Hidden hazards- rocks, stones, debris	Hidden hazards- weeds, rocks, debris
Trip hazards	Cold water	Dangerous banks
Other swimmers	Offshore winds	Canal locks, weirs

### Additional considerations

It is important to consider the following when swimming outside:

- Always look for guidance and warning signs
- Swim parallel with the shore line and in standing depth of water
- Avoid drifting in the current
- Get out as soon as you start to feel cold
- Wash hands and face in fresh clean water and if possible, take a shower straight afterwards


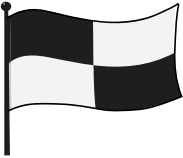
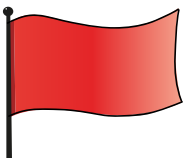
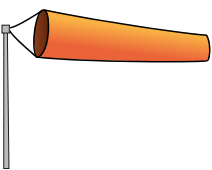
### Beaches

When at the beach, children should adhere to the following water safety guidance:

- Only swim at lifeguarded beaches
- Learn the meaning of different coloured beach flags
- Read safety signs
- Check tide times to avoid being cut off by incoming tides

### Beach flags

The beach flags are displayed by the lifeguards in patrolled areas to provide guidance on the water and wind conditions. The flags also inform beach users where the swimming and water sports zones are. When travelling outside of the UK you should check the meaning of flags locally as there is no international standard.

Flag Colour	What it means
	<b>Red and Yellow Flag</b> Lifeguards patrol between these flags. It is the safest area to swim, body board and use inflatables.
	<b>Black and White Chequered Flag</b> This shows it is a 'Hard craft zone area' for water sports such as surfing. This means it is unsafe for swimming and you should not swim there.
	<b>Red Flag</b> Never go into the water when the red flag is flying. This could be for a range of reasons and may change from day-to-day.
	<b>Wind Sock</b> This shows the direction and force of the wind. Very strong winds can be hazardous for swimmers so if it is full, do not take inflatables into the water in the water.

### 3. Cold Water Shock

Falling into or swimming in cold water makes it more difficult to swim, breathe and stay alert

#### The first reactions are:

- Gasping for breath
- Heart rate will increase and become very fast

#### Followed by:

- The muscles in the arms and legs start to get cold
- Lose coordination of the arms and legs
- Lose the ability to swim

#### What to do:

- Keep calm
- Float on your back
- Gain control of your breathing by taking slow, deep breaths
- Float, scull or tread water and signal for help
- If possible swim to safety or something that floats
- It is important to keep warm and retain your body heat by taking up the Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP) or huddle position (see below)

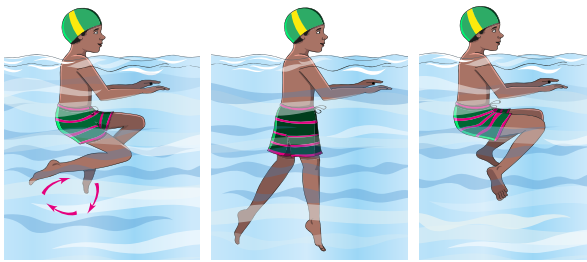
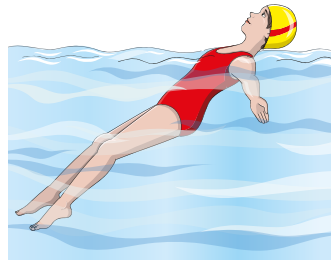


## 4. Survival and self-rescue skills

### Flotation

Floating uses the natural buoyancy of the body to hold a stationary or near stationary position, whilst maintaining a clear airway and minimising energy loss.

If a child unintentionally falls into the water or finds themselves in difficulty, they should float on their back until they catch their breath and decide what to do next. Shouting, waving, signalling, treading water and swimming are all options that should be considered.



### Treading water

Treading water is used to maintain a clear airway. This allows time to consider options, look around, and then signal or shout to attract the attention of potential rescuers.

### Signal for help

If a person is in trouble in the water, once they have calmed down and assessed the situation they should consider signalling for help. To do this they should raise one hand in the air while treading water and shout "HELP!" It is important only one hand is raised in the air as it uses a large amount of energy to do so, especially if clothed. In wavy conditions care should be taken not to inhale water while shouting, the arm should be lowered if it makes it difficult to maintain an airway and priority given to remaining at the surface of the water.

### Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP)

Using the Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP) reduces heat loss in cold water. Wearing a buoyancy aid or holding a buoyant object such as a float, the swimmer should draw their knees up to their chest, hugging them close to their body with both arms. The head should stay clear of the water and legs should stay together to retain heat.





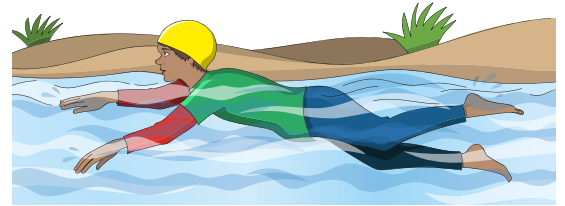
## Huddle Position

If a group of people are together in the water they can huddle together to conserve body heat, support each other and provide a larger target for rescuers. Using floating objects (noodles or floats) swimmers should make a tight circle and hold the floating object. Heads should be clear of the water and one swimmer should raise an arm and shout for help.



## Conserving energy

Personal survival stroke is an important skill to preserve energy and body heat while moving efficiently to safety or a buoyancy aid. It is important the arms remain underneath the water, especially if clothed, as this is easier than being above the water and will help to save energy.



## What to do if others get into difficulties

- Raise the alarm. Dial 999 or 112. The caller will be asked to give their location and explain what has happened.
- Shout and signal to attract others to help and let the person in the water know they have been seen.
- Try throwing something that floats and they can hold onto while they wait for help.
- Give clear instruction e.g. 'kick your legs' and 'swim towards me'.
- Use hand signals and a loud voice to help guide the person to safety.
- Keep watching and calling to encourage them to swim to safety.